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SUBJECT: APPROACHING THE EU IN ADVANCE OF THE MARCH 28-29
FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING (GYMNICH)

REF: N/A

11. (U) This is an action request. See paragraph 7.

12. (SBU) Summary: EU Foreign Ministers will hold an informal meeting (GYMNICH) in Ljubljana on March 28-29. We expect the agenda to include: Western Balkans (Serbia/Kosovo), Israeli-Palestinian peace process, Lebanon-Syria, China/Tibet, and Russia-EU relations. Posts are requested to include the SIPDIS caption on their response cables. A background section covering some of these issues is provided prior to a section containing talking points. Points are to be delivered as soon as possible at the appropriate level to EU members only. Other posts should not/not deliver these points.

BACKGROUND

WESTERN BALKANS

13. (SBU) Despite efforts of Serb hardliners to provoke violence and protests, especially in Mitrovica earlier this week, we assess the overall situation in Kosovo as reasonably stable and positive. Both the Government of Kosovo and the Kosovo Albanian majority have exercised admirable restraint so far. As of March 21, thirty-six countries have recognized or announced an intent to recognize Kosovo, including twenty EU Member States. The initial meeting of the International Steering Group (ISG) took place in Vienna on February 28; twelve EU countries, along with the U.S., Switzerland and Turkey, attended and appointed Pieter Feith to be Kosovo's first International Civilian Representative (ICR). DOS received authorization in mid-March to begin work on a Participation Agreement with the EU for the USG role in the EULEX Kosovo rule of law mission; while preliminary negotiations have already begun, a formal team is scheduled to travel to Brussels at the end of this month. In regard to Macedonia, Greece has threatened to veto its NATO invitation because of the name issue. A veto of Macedonia's NATO invitation would be a significant blow our shared goal of accelerating the Balkans' Euro-Atlantic integration and would increase regional instability. While we object to this threat of a

veto, we are working with both sides to urge a solution.

ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN PEACE

14. (SBU) The Secretary's recent trip resulted in the resumption of negotiations. Secretary Rice has made clear, both privately and publicly, that we must ensure continuous progress in Israeli-Palestinians political negotiations on core issues even in the face of unhelpful developments. At the same time, it is crucial that we begin to see some progress on the ground both in terms of capacity building, and action by the parties to address their commitments under the Roadmap. Our goals remain Israeli-Palestinian Roadmap implementation, Palestinian capacity building (the mission of Quartet Representative

Blair and LTG Dayton's Security Sector Reform), Arab outreach to Israel and support for this process, and progress on political talks between Abbas and Olmert and their negotiating teams. We continue to encourage expanded budgetary support for the PA, especially by Arab states. The next AHLC meeting on May 2 in the UK will provide a good opportunity to push donors to meet and expand their budgetary support to the PA.

SYRIA/LEBANON

15. (SBU) We encourage our European partners to join us in providing meaningful support for the Siniora government, including unified international pressure on Syria and the

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opposition to allow an immediate and unconditional presidential election, funding to support Lebanese security services and mitigate Lebanese debt problems, and high-level visits and statements of support. We also urge additional EU financial support for the UN Special Tribunal on Lebanon, which will help end the era of impunity for political assassinations and deter further violence. We discourage post-Annapolis engagement of Syria and urge High Representative Solana to serve as the sole point-of-contact between Damascus and EU Member States. France has supported Solana as the designated EU interlocutor with Syria for some time now, and German Chancellor Merkel stated publicly on March 14 that Germany should pursue a policy of isolation towards Syria and that only Solana should talk to the Syrian government.

16. (SBU) Syrian government actions have been increasingly detrimental to the peace process, best demonstrated by the January 23-25 "anti-Annapolis" conference hosted by Damascus-based rejectionist groups and facilitated by the Syrian government. Two Syrian government ministers attended the conference even while Dutch FM Verhagen visited Damascus. Isolation-not engagement-is the best way to improve Syrian behavior. We also need our European partners to visibly maintain their support for the March 14 movement that led the Cedar Revolution in 2005 and brought PM Siniora to power.

17. (SBU) ACTION REQUEST: Please deliver the following points to the appropriate MFA official(s) as soon as possible (in advance of March 28-29 Gymnich).

BEGIN NON-PAPER TEXT

WESTERN BALKANS

--Despite the efforts of Serb hardliners to provoke violence and protests, we assess the overall situation in Kosovo as generally stable and positive. Neither the Kosovo government nor the Albanian majority has responded to the provocations; their restraint so far has been admirable.

--We emphasize, however, the vital importance of

supporting UNMIK and its efforts to uphold law and order, as well as KFOR support to UNMIK throughout Kosovo. We need continued EU support in pressing both the UN and UNMIK to respond in the appropriate way to Serbian provocations. We need to make sure that we do not get lured into an unwinnable and unproductive fight; our aim is to ensure control of the border and maintain an appropriate international community presence in Northern Kosovo. With UNSCR 1244 remaining in effect, UNMIK still has important responsibilities. We should insist that the people inciting violence be held fully accountable and guard against efforts to push the partition of northern Kosovo through the establishment of a de facto Kosovo-Serb "entity." KFOR is responding appropriately and coordinating well with UNMIK police. We fully support and commend the successful UNMIK/KFOR operation on March 17 to retake a UN courthouse that Kosovo Serb thugs had illegally occupied.

--We should continue to urge Belgrade to use its influence to rein in troublemakers and insist that Serb officials speak clearly in rejecting all violence. The Serbian May 11 elections will likely create additional tensions and flash points. UNMIK needs to be judicious in providing security and limiting Serb provocations and avoid promoting Radical extremists. We need to encourage reformist democratic forces in Kosovo and Serbia that are looking for a way to move past this issue.

--We welcome the recognitions and declarations of intent to recognize by an overwhelming majority of EU member states (Note: As of March 21, eighteen EU member states have officially recognized Kosovo and two more have declared their intent to do so. End note.) We look forward to additional recognitions very soon.

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--(Special point for Prague, Vilnius, Lisbon, Athens and Valletta only:) What is the current status of the Kosovo recognition debate? When can we expect your government to join us and the overwhelming EU majority in recognizing Kosovo's independence? Your government's recognition remains extremely important in fully welcoming Kosovo into the international community of nations.

--(Special point for Madrid only:) In the wake of the March 9 elections, what is the current status of the Kosovo recognition debate? Can we expect Madrid to join us and the overwhelming EU majority in recognizing Kosovo's independence?

--We also welcome the participation of many EU member states in the creation of the International Steering Group (ISG) last month and the naming of Pieter Feith, the EU Special Representative for Kosovo, as the International Civilian Representative for Kosovo. The ISG's initial meeting was held on February 28 in Vienna -- other countries may join provided they meet the criteria of having recognized Kosovo and having contributed resources to Kosovo's development. We would be glad to provide any follow-up information on the work of the ISG and the role of its participating members.

--The U.S. remains committed to participating in the EULEX Kosovo mission. We recently received authorization to begin work on a Participation Agreement with the EU and have already started preliminary negotiations. We expect to send a team to Brussels for formal talks the week of March 24. We had excellent discussions in Washington recently with EULEX Head of Mission Yves de Kermabon and EU Planning Team Head Roy Reeve. We must acknowledge frankly that EULEX will face serious challenges in establishing a presence throughout Kosovo, especially in the north.

--While there will surely be challenges ahead, our

assessment is that long-term stability and development in region will best be achieved through full implementation of UN Special Envoy Ahtisaari's recommendations. We look forward to working with the EU, World Bank, IMF, and other potential donors to assist Kosovo both in the post-independence transition and longer-term.

-- Macedonia: Greece has threatened to veto a NATO invitation for Macedonia because of the name issue. A veto of Macedonia's NATO invitation would be a significant blow our shared goal of accelerating the Balkans' Euro-Atlantic integration and would increase regional instability.

-- While we object to this veto threat, we are working with both sides to urge a solution and have urged creative and flexible approaches.

SYRIA/LEBANON

--We urge European states to assist in strengthening Lebanon's institutions, including the parliament, cabinet, and military, through statements of support for their legitimacy and continued financial assistance. The Lebanese opposition, with support from Syria and Iran, is trying to erode Lebanon's constitutional institutions, thereby undermining Lebanese sovereignty and allowing the reassertion of Syrian influence.

--We urge continued vocal support for the Arab League initiative. There are reports that Syria is has abandoned the initiative and is circulating another proposal. European states should make it clear that no other deal is on the table, continue calls for immediate presidential elections, and maintain outreach and public support for the governing March 14 coalition.

--We ask the EU and its Member States to press Syria to stop blocking Lebanese elections and allow the Lebanese to

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find a solution to the current political impasse. Elections must be allowed to occur immediately and without pre-condition.

--We urge European states to press for full Syrian compliance with pertinent UN Security Council resolutions. Syria must end its direct support for militant groups in Lebanon, enforce the UNSCR 1701 arms embargo, and answer Lebanon's calls to demarcate their common border.

--We discourage engagement with the al-Asad regime. Recent visits between European and Syrian officials have only emboldened the Syrian government (SARG). Since Syria's participation in Annapolis, it has received multiple European ministers in Damascus, and Syrian officials have been received in Europe. And yet, Syrian interference in Lebanon, support for Hizballah, and facilitation of foreign fighters to Iraq continues apace, while repression of Syrian democracy activists at home has increased. As Chancellor Merkel stated in a March 14 interview, High Representative Solana should serve as the sole EU interlocutor with the Syrian government.

CHINA: SITUATION IN TIBET

--We hope your government will help us to reinforce Secretary Rice's call for China to exercise restraint and

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to respect the fundamental right of all citizens to peacefully express their views. We have urged Chinese authorities to show leniency to protesters who express their views peacefully, and all sides should refrain from violence.

--As President Bush has stated many times, we call on China to engage in substantive dialogue with the Dalai Lama directly and through his representatives to resolve long-standing issues with regard to Tibet.

--The Chinese government continues to deny us permission to send an official from our Embassy in Beijing to Lhasa and other affected areas to assess the situation. We encourage you to reinforce our message by pressing the Chinese government for international access to Lhasa and other affected areas.

--(IF ASKED Talking Points on the 2008 Beijing Olympics:) The USG wants to see a successful Olympics and does not support calls for an Olympics boycott. However, we continue to urge China to live up to its Olympics bid

commitments to increase access to information and expand freedom of the press, including in Tibetan areas, as well as to take steps to address its record on human rights and religious freedom.

--(IF ASKED Talking Points on the 2008 Beijing Olympics:) We are deeply concerned about the lack of reliable information from Tibetan areas and the restrictions being imposed on foreign journalists and international observers. The Chinese government appears to be deliberately obstructing the flow of information into and out of Tibetan areas and restricting the coverage of these events in China. Such restrictions run counter to China's promise to open China to the world and to allow foreign reporters greater freedoms to report in all parts of China before and during the 2008 Olympic Games.

EU-RUSSIA RELATIONS

--Secretaries Rice and Gates' March 17-18 "2 plus 2" talks in Moscow with their Russian counterparts yielded substantial progress on the development of a U.S.-Russia Strategic Framework to find common ground and put our security, political and economic relations on a positive track. While we made significant progress in many areas of discussion, we will need to continue working to close the gaps in those areas where disagreement remains.

--As the EU considers the launch of negotiations on a new

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Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Russia later this year, it is only natural to reflect upon where relations presently stand and where they should be heading. With Dmitry Medvedev also poised to assume the Russian presidency in May, this would be an appropriate time for all of us to "take stock" of current developments in our relations with Moscow.

--As the recent 2 plus 2 talks showed, the US and EU must have a common voice when speaking to Russia about European missile defense (MD). We should continue to pursue a cooperative approach with Russia on missile defense, if at all possible, and work to overcome Russian concerns to make clear that MD assets in Europe do not threaten Russian security.

--Russia's resumption of its Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty implementation is essential to European security. The U.S. and NATO Allies continue to consult with Russia on a possible resolution to the current impasse based on the US-conceived Parallel Actions plan. Russia's "suspension" of its CFE commitments, however, has made it harder to find any solutions.

--We should encourage continued Russian cooperation in preventing Iran from developing a nuclear weapons program. The international community must stand firm on the need for Iran to comply with its UNSC obligations and to

restore international confidence in the peaceful nature of its nuclear program. Russian arms sales to countries of concern like Iran seriously undermine regional stability and risk escalation of ongoing conflicts.

--We both need to urge Russia to cooperate constructively in the Balkans to ensure peace and stability during Kosovo's transition to independence. We should work with Russia to promote Serbia's democratic development and ensure that Kosovo's Serbs are adequately protected while also pressing Moscow to refrain from any tacit support or encouragement of extremism in the region.

--We remain very concerned over human rights and democratic backsliding in Russia. We are troubled by the growing centralization of power, the flawed Duma elections last December, the heavy-handed orchestration of the presidential succession, Russian efforts to weaken the OSCE, and increasing restrictions on civil society and the media in Russia. We note that in a recent speech in Krasnoyarsk, Medvedev named personal freedoms and the rule of law as the necessary foundations of a future modern Russia. We support this reformist agenda, in particular the development of a robust, pluralistic civil society and free press.

--A common external policy on diversity of energy supply is essential for EU energy security. Recently, several EU member states have reached bilateral deals with Gazprom; this prevents the EU from presenting a united front on energy policy and does not enhance diversity of energy supply. The EU should work together to ensure Gazprom operates in a transparent manner and does not use its

market power to exclude competitors. Russia will always be one of Europe's main suppliers of energy, but Europe must deal with Russia on equal footing.

END NON-PAPER TEXT
RICE